Self-Development Handbook

U.S.ARMY

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The Self-Development Process

Identify Your Strengths & Weaknesses

Where Should I Go?

Learning to Learn

Move Forward & Measure Progress

Army Self-Development Handbook

Foreword

The Army accomplishes a wide array of missions in diverse and unusual circumstances around the world. At the same time, the Army is engaged in a massive and accelerated transformation that will infuse new organizations, technologies, and capabilities throughout the Army. To meet the recurring challenges, Army personnel must supplement institutional and organizational training and education with continuous, planned self-development.

Self-development is also important to achieving your personal and professional goals. Maybe you want to qualify for an advanced level in your career or for a different career track altogether. Maybe you lack skills or knowledge. Or, maybe there is something you've just always wanted to learn or become more knowledgeable about. Whatever the case, you can use the information and exercises in this Self-Development Handbook to set your direction for self-development and help you take action.

Your personal growth benefits both you and the Army. Due to the diversity of the Army's missions and needs, there are many self-development topics to study—from gaining leadership skills to learning a new language. No matter what you choose to focus on, you will make yourself and your current or future organization more adaptable, agile, and resilient by adding depth and variety of expertise.

This handbook draws on lessons from the field, educational and leadership research, and applicable Army regulations and doctrine to provide you with state-of-the-art guidance on designing and implementing your own program of self-development. I encourage you to use this handbook to reach the highest levels of professionalism for yourself and for the future of the Army.

> BRUCE J. REIDER
> Colonel, Aviation
> Director, Combined Arms Center—Center for Army Leadership

Self-Development in the Army

The Army defines self-development as planned, goal-oriented learning that reinforces and expands the depth and breadth of an individual's knowledge base, self-awareness, and situational awareness. Self-development will complement what you have learned in the classroom and on the job, enhance your professional competence, and help you meet your objectives. There are three types of self-development:

- *Structured Self-Development:* <u>Required</u> learning that continues throughout your career and that is closely linked to and synchronized with classroom and on-the-job learning.

- *Guided Self-Development:* <u>Recommended</u> but optional learning that will help keep you prepared for changing technical, functional, and leadership responsibilities throughout your career.

- *Personal Self-Development:* <u>Self-initiated</u> learning where you define the objective, pace, and process.

How to Use This Handbook

The contents of this handbook will help you perform all three types of self-development. If you are pursuing personal self-development, this handbook offers exercises and information you can use to determine your self-development direction and start immediately working toward it. If you already have a direction for your self-development, the handbook will help you achieve progress in that direction.

Wherever you find yourself in the journey for professional growth, this handbook is organized to assist with:

1. Recognizing strengths and weaknesses (What are you good and not so good at?)
2. Setting or confirming self-development direction (Where should you go?)
3. Making the most of learning opportunities (How do you learn?)
4. Measuring progress and continuing to move forward (How well are you doing?)

You are in charge of your own development, and you can use this handbook in whatever way fits your situation. You can read through it in order and complete all of the exercises along the way, or go directly to chapters and exercises that interest you most. Either way, this handbook will help you take action to set and achieve your self-development objectives. Self-development is intrinsically linked to self-awareness; each supporting the other and raising the capabilities of the individual. By being aware of yourself including your traits, feelings, and behaviors, you will become the agile and adaptive individual that the Army values in its leaders. Let's get started!

The story of a fictional character named "Sergeant Marco Santoni" will appear throughout the handbook. Marco will describe how to apply the information in this handbook.

SGT Marco Santoni is a team leader in a Military Police unit. His primary responsibilities are to lead and train the soldiers in his team so that they can perform their law enforcement and other military police responsibilities in both garrison and the field. In addition to leading and training his soldiers, Marco is responsible for briefing monthly statistics on unit law enforcement actions.

Marco was promoted to Sergeant about a year ago and has been in the Army for a little less than five years. He has had one Stateside assignment, which included a combat deployment, and served two years in South Korea. He has been at his current post for eight months. All in all, Army life seems to fit Marco. His career has gone well, and he has had a variety of interesting experiences. At this point, Marco definitely intends to make the Army his career.

Contents

1. Identify Your Strengths and Weaknesses

Before you can set your self-development direction you need to understand your current strengths and weaknesses. This is part of being self-aware.

- *What are you good at?* Maybe you excel at fixing engines, teaching others, or performing physically demanding activities. When using your strengths, time flies by and you learn quickly.

- *What are you not so good at?* Weaknesses are the areas where you feel uncomfortable, bored, ineffective, or frustrated. Maybe it's hard for you to speak in front of groups or to work with numbers.

> "Each person's greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her greatest strength."
>
> – Buckingham & Clifton,
> *Now, Discover Your Strengths*

Chances are, you have more strengths than you think (and possibly more weaknesses). The first step in identifying your strengths and weaknesses is to think about what you do and how well you do it. At a minimum, this information comes from your own self-examination. However, it is a good idea to get information about yourself from outside sources, such as formal assessments and others who know you, so that you can have this information in mind as you conduct a self-examination.

This chapter will help you identify your strengths and weaknesses by giving you the tools you need to:

- Collect results from formal assessments (such as evaluations and tests).

- Gather feedback from others.

- Perform a self-exam.

- Identify your strengths and weaknesses.

As you go through the following exercises keep your responses handy. You'll need them when it comes time to finalize your list of strengths and weaknesses. First, we'll cover how to gather information from formal assessments.

Collect Information From Formal Assessments

Formal assessments are a good place to start gaining insight into your strengths and weaknesses, as they measure your performance and compare it to a standard. Formal assessments include things like:

- Performance evaluations (e.g., NCOER, OER, and civilian evaluations)

- Skills tests (e.g., Expert Field Medical Badge & Expert Infantryman Badge tests)

- Tests administered in resident and non-resident schools

- Field performance evaluations, such as those at the combat training centers

- Intelligence and aptitude tests (e.g., ASVAB and DLAB)

- Occupational interest inventories (e.g., Strong Interest Inventory)

- Personality assessments (e.g., California Psychological Inventory, 16PF)

You also may be able to participate in a multi-source assessment and feedback program (sometimes called a 360-degree assessment) where superiors, peers, and subordinates provide anonymous feedback.

Consider information from any relevant assessments you have taken and use the results later, when you do your self-exam and determine your strengths and weaknesses.

Marco's Story

Like most soldiers, Marco has been tested in many different ways. Since joining the Army, the test that he has experienced most often is the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). Fortunately, he is in excellent physical condition and regularly earns a score above 285. He has also proven his fitness as well as his ability to learn and work under pressure by earning the Air Assault Badge. Most recently, Marco's leadership ability and professionalism were recognized in his nomination as post NCO of the year. Marco has an aptitude for learning foreign languages. In high school, he took three years of Spanish and earned excellent grades. In the years since high school, his Spanish speaking skills have become a bit rusty, but he is still able to read and understand written Spanish fairly well. His aptitude for languages is reflected in his high Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB) score of 107.

Next, we'll look at how you can get information from others who have been able to observe your actions and performance.

Gather Feedback From Others

Hearing or remembering what your peers, subordinates, superiors, family, and friends think about you can help identify your strengths and weaknesses that you haven't noticed before or have been reluctant to acknowledge.

There are two ways to get feedback from others. You can either watch how they act around you to figure out what they think of you or you can ask them directly. Your supervisor has an explicit role to be involved in your development. Your supervisor

"It takes humility to seek feedback. It takes wisdom to understand it, analyze it, and appropriately act on it."

– Stephen R. Covey,
First Things First

can be consulted in the event that you need guidance about a direction for development or any other aspect of the self-development process.

Exercise: Watch How Others Act Toward You

Watching how other people act toward you and the decisions they make that affect you will give you an idea of what they think about your skills and expertise. When observing others:

- *Make several observations on different occasions.* Watching the same person several times will help you see trends that may be a sign of a firmly held opinion of you. Watching someone once isn't very reliable, as their behavior may have been a result of other issues.

- *Consider the circumstances.* What outside factors influenced the person's decisions and actions? For example, if your supervisor selected someone else to perform an important task, was it because you were too busy or unavailable?

Answer the following questions about your supervisor, peers, and subordinates to help reveal their opinions of you.

Supervisor

- Who gets the most challenging assignments in your work group?

- Who does your supervisor go to in an emergency or to get tough problems solved?

- Who does your supervisor praise the most in your work group?

- What kinds of tasks does your supervisor give you versus others?

- How does your supervisor react to your suggestions compared to others' suggestions?

- Does your supervisor listen to your opinions on certain subjects much more or much less than the opinions of others in your work group? If so, what are those subjects?

Peers & Subordinates

- Do peers and subordinates come to you for help or advice? On what topics?

- Do they understand you or seem confused or overwhelmed by what you say?

- Do they repeatedly contact you for help, or do your contacts tend to be one-time interactions?

- Does their enthusiasm and interest remain high or increase when they interact with you, or does it seem to diminish?

- What does their body language communicate? Is it relaxed, apprehensive, reserved, etc.?

After you consider these questions, analyze your answers to determine the opinions that the person may have of your strengths and weaknesses.

Asking for Feedback

You can learn a lot about others' perceptions of you by observing their interactions with you, but your conclusions will only be educated guesses unless you ask them directly. When asking for feedback, try to talk to people who know you in different ways. The goal is to find out:

• What a person actually saw you do and that person's impressions of your actions

• That person's impression of how well you did

• How you react in certain situations. For example, "When a subordinate challenges your authority in front of others, you seem to get flustered and be at a loss for words."

To gain as much insight as possible when getting feedback from people, use the tips below.

Who to Ask

• Ask people who have been able to observe you enough to offer useful information.

• Ask people who have observed you from different perspectives.

• Ask a former or current supervisor, mentor, or teacher who may have greater experience in an area of interest.

Types of Questions to Ask

• Get descriptions of your behaviors and what they thought about your behaviors.

• For feedback about a recurring problem, ask about the situation in which the problem occurs, your actions in the situation, and the usual outcomes that result.

• Ask for suggestions for other ways of handling problem situations.

Things to Remember When Asking Questions

• Be respectful of other people's time, and prepare questions ahead of time.

• Listen carefully and respectfully.

• Ask for clarification and examples when points are unclear.

• Summarize the points to make sure that you understand the person correctly.

• Thank the feedback providers for their time and assistance.

Compare the feedback you receive from different people to look for common themes. These themes will help to identify your strengths and weaknesses.

Marco's Story

Marco has had considerable success in his work and personal activities. He has noticed that his commander often comes to him with special projects, especially projects that require creative ways of communicating with others. For example, last fall, the commander asked Marco to help advertise the Provost Marshal's safe driving campaign. The clever posters and Post TV spots that Marco designed made the campaign such a success that Marco was awarded an Army Achievement Medal for his work. More recently, the commander gave Marco an even bigger challenge when she asked Marco to help plan a new youth outreach program. In addition to the commander tapping Marco's talents, the First Sergeant has repeatedly asked Marco to design and deliver NCO professional development training to noncommissioned officers in the company.

A few weeks ago, Marco asked Lucy Morgan, the head of his church's Outreach Committee, to give him some feedback on his performance as a member of the committee. Lucy told Marco that she was very impressed with Marco's ability to interact productively with others, especially those of different faiths and cultures. This ability was critical when Marco represented his church at a meeting of the Area Interfaith Network to determine how food donated to the local food bank would be divided among Network member organizations. On the other hand, Lucy told Marco that his late submission of the monthly Resources Reports hampered her ability to plan ahead.

Now that you have gathered information from outside sources through formal assessments, observing others, and requesting feedback, it is time for you to examine your own behavior and performance.

Perform a Self-Exam

Examining the way you live your life and the situations you have experienced can reveal things you may want to change or improve. The exercises below will help you take a look at your experiences so that you can better identify your strengths and weaknesses.

Exercise: Do a Situation Analysis

Think of a few situations you've experienced over the past two years that give insight into your strengths and weaknesses—maybe a critical decision you've had to make, an important task you've led or been a part of, or even a significant personal interaction. Use the questions below to help analyze each situation.

1. What was the situation?
   What was happening, who was there?

2. What was your goal and did you reach it?
   What were you trying to accomplish, what resources or skills did you have or not have that you needed?

3. What did you say and think?

Were you able to find the right words to make your point? What were you thinking at the time? What made you feel good (confident, excited) or bad (confused, worried)?

4. What did you do?

How did you act (including your body language)? Why did you choose to act the way you did? How did others react? Did you help or hurt the situation? Did you adjust your actions based on how others were reacting?

5. Why did you act the way you did?

What knowledge and skills led you to act the way you did?

6. What could have helped you handle the situation better?

How could you have used your strengths to reach a better outcome? Are there any weaknesses that you should make a high priority for your self-development efforts?

Use the questions above and this form to record important information from your experience. After you record the information, look for key factors that influenced how the situation progressed and the overall outcome. These factors may suggest strengths or weaknesses that you will want to work on in your self-development effort. For example, if you froze when you had to give a briefing to a senior leader, maybe you should work on your briefing skills or comfort level working with senior leaders. If you lacked knowledge or a skill that you needed to achieve a goal, you may want to work to gain that knowledge or skill. If you felt confident or performed well, you could identify the strengths (knowledge, skills, or abilities) that allowed this and then work to make them even stronger.

By knowing how your actions affected the situation and your thoughts and feelings associated with those actions, you can work to become more self-aware and able to consciously choose the most productive actions. In addition to identifying specific strengths and weaknesses, your situation analysis may suggest broader interests that you would like to pursue or things that you want to avoid in the future. Keep in mind that if you see the same factor at work in multiple situations, it is likely to be a significant strength or weakness that you may want to develop. These are only a few of the ways that a situation analysis may suggest self-development objectives. What do your situations suggest?

Situation Analysis
What was the situation?

What was your goal and did you reach it?

What did you say and think?

What did you do?

Why did you act the way you did?

What could have helped you handle the situation better?

Marco's Story

Situation Analysis

What was the situation?

I was filling in as MP desk sergeant for two weeks while the regular desk sergeant, SSG Kelso, was in the hospital. I had to keep detailed operational records and the duty log.

What was your goal and did you reach it?

My goal was to perform the work correctly and keep accurate and complete records until SSG Kelso returned and I could get back to patrol duty.

What did you say and think?

The work wasn't hard, but there were a lot of details to keep track of and information to record. Sitting at the desk and doing paperwork all day was boring. I wanted to be out on post patrol and kept thinking about what MP activities were going on around post.

What did you do?

I filled out the forms and kept the duty log, but I often found myself thinking about other things and falling behind in my work. I tried to catch up, but I missed some important details. The 1SG counseled me about the spotty records. I managed to focus on the work and do a satisfactory job for the rest of the assignment.

Why did you act the way you did?

I didn't like the administrative work. I wanted to be out on patrol doing active MP work. I found it hard to concentrate on the recordkeeping.

What could have helped you handle the situation better?

I could have exercised better self-control. I could have stayed motivated by reminding myself of the importance of the work, my status and responsibilities as a professional NCO, and the fact that the assignment was temporary and short in duration.

When Marco analyzed this situation, he drew two conclusions. First, he was reminded that he would sometimes have to perform duties that he didn't enjoy, and that he would have to have the motivation and self-control to perform these duties satisfactorily. So, developing greater self-awareness and self-discipline in those situations was a possible self-development objective. Second, he recognized that he would be dissatisfied with a career path that required a lot of administrative work or recordkeeping.

Exercise: Do a Self-Analysis

Complete the statements below as they relate to any part of your life—work or home. Be as specific as you can. Use as many or as few items as you find necessary to identify unique aspects of your strengths and weaknesses.

Self-Analysis
Strengths
The skill or ability that I am best at is
The personal quality that I rely on most for my success is
I am most knowledgeable about
The activities I look forward to include
I would love to learn more about
The accomplishment I am most proud of is
Others usually come to me for help on
Others think the best job for me would be

Weaknesses

The skill or ability that is always difficult for me is

I don't know as much as I should about

I usually go to others for help on

The situation that causes me the most frustration is

I am most hesitant when I try to

I am most concerned about my

Others think I am not very good at

I would become a more valued member of my organization if I

Marco's Story

Marco has many pastimes that he enjoys, including his volunteer work as a member of his church's Outreach Committee. He is very interested in seeing and learning about other cultures. He likes to read about the people and geography of other countries and enjoys stories that take place in exotic locations. He also likes to travel when he can. Marco even volunteered for an assignment in South Korea so that he could see a country and culture that were very different from his. When he considers why he likes to do these activities, he realizes that they help him understand human behavior and feel comfortable in dealing with people who are different from himself. In addition, his work with the church Outreach Committee gives Marco the opportunity to help others, which he finds to be very rewarding.

Although most would find law enforcement activities to be stressful, Marco finds this to be the best part of his job in garrison. He is excellent at assessing unclear situations and making the right decisions. He readily understands the perspectives of others and can calm people down and defuse tense situations. Marco's talents really stand out when he works and trains in the field. His most memorable field experience came during his Korean assignment when he had the opportunity to work closely with Special Forces and Psychological Operations personnel in a major field exercise. He loved the physical and mental challenges of the special operations work—long-range operations on foot in the Korean mountains, working with the local population and South Korean Special Forces, and coming up with creative solutions to unique problems.

On the other hand, he hates the drudgery of gathering law enforcement statistics, preparing written reports and briefing slides for the monthly commander's briefing, and delivering the briefings. He finds the routine, repetitive tasks of compiling statistics and preparing reports and briefings boring and draining. Although he manages to come through with a good job on the statistics, reports, and briefings, he finds the work so painful that he usually puts it off until the last minute.

Self-Analysis

Strengths

The skill or ability that I am best at is

working with others who are very different from me.

The personal quality that I rely on most for my success is

flexibility and creativity.

I would love to learn more about
the korean language and culture

The activities I look forward to include
finding creative solutions to problems in the field, traveling, and meeting new people

Others think the best job for me would be
Special Forces

Weaknesses

The situation that causes me the most frustration is
doing paperwork and working in an office

I am most hesitant when I try to
prepare the monthly law enforcement briefing.

Others think I am not very good at
administrative tasks

Identify Your Strengths and Weaknesses

The final step is to take the information you gathered from (1) formal assessments, (2) other people (information gathered from observing others and asking others), and (3) your self-exam (results of your situation and self-analyses) and use it to determine your strengths and weaknesses.

Instead of taking all of the feedback about your behavior from others as fact, look for recurring themes or patterns of feedback you heard from more than one person. Look at what others identified as your strengths and weaknesses and compare that to what you know about yourself (from the self-exam) and what you learned when looking at the results of your formal assessments.

- Strengths are usually indicated by repeated success or expertise in a particular type of activity. These abilities may come easily to you even though others find them difficult.

  - What did you note as being your favorite things to do, learn about?

  - What do other people turn to you for help with?

  - What do your recent assessments show are your strengths?

- Weaknesses are tasks that you struggle to learn; have difficulty performing; or find boring, draining, or tedious.

  - What did you note as being hard or not fun to do?

  - What did other people suggest as a limitation of yours?

  - Did formal assessments point out any deficiencies?

Identify where these descriptions apply and make a list of your strengths and weaknesses. You will need this list to be able to set a clear direction for your self-development efforts, which is the subject of the next chapter, *Where Should I Go?*

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_____

_____

_____

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Marco's Story

Marco reviews the information he has gathered to identify his strengths and weaknesses. He likes physically and mentally challenging activities in the outdoors, activities that allow him to work face-to-face with people, situations that require him to use his judgment in making rapid decisions, and learning as much as he can about other countries and cultures. On the other hand, he tries to avoid administrative work that he sees as dry and impersonal.

Marco determines that his strengths include cultural understanding and the ability to work with people from very different cultures, creative problem solving, physical strength and endurance, and learning foreign languages. His weaknesses include administrative tasks, analyzing data and statistics, writing reports, and most indoor solitary work.
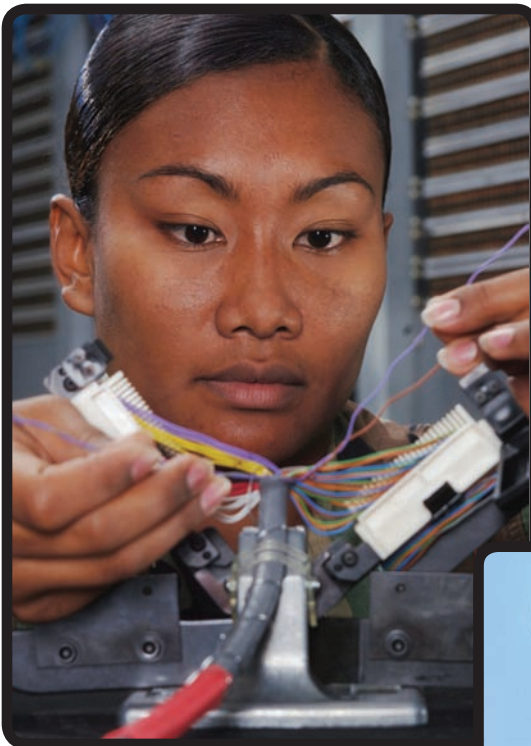
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2. Where Should I Go?

To make the most of your self-development efforts and avoid wasting time and energy, it is crucial that you set a direction for your self-development. In other words, identify your personal and professional goals and decide where you should go. This chapter will help you:

• Gather the information you need to decide where you should go with your self-development.

• Set your self-development direction.

• Plan milestones to keep you on track.

> "If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else."
>
>   – Yogi Berra

Gather Information to Decide Where You Should Go

An understanding of your strengths and weaknesses (discussed in the last chapter) is an important place to start when determining where you should focus your self-development efforts. Other areas you may want to analyze for self-development opportunities include:

• Your personal and work roles and responsibilities, and

• The needs of the Army.

Roles and Responsibilities

Your roles and responsibilities at home and at work may offer opportunities for self-development. For example, you may be a spouse, parent, teacher, soldier, mechanic, or fill one (or several) of hundreds of other roles. Each role has different responsibilities, skill and knowledge requirements, and expectations for your behavior. FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*, describes key roles for officers, warrant officers, NCOs, and Army civilians.

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Roles that you have chosen for yourself usually reflect your interests and values, but even the roles you are given will affect the value of different self-development paths you may take. The more your roles and responsibilities overlap with your talents and interests, the more likely you are to get satisfaction from your work and be successful.

Exercise: Analyze Your Roles and Responsibilities

Think of the roles you fill at home and at work. List three to four of your most important roles. Next to each role, list the two most important responsibilities that you have in that role.

Roles and Responsibilities	
Roles	**Responsibilities**

Now think about the roles and responsibilities you have listed and identify knowledge, skills, or attitudes that you would like to learn or strengthen so you can better perform these roles and responsibilities. List the things you would like to learn below:

Marco's Story

After determining his strengths and weaknesses, Marco turns his attention to other considerations that might influence the self-development direction that he will take. First, he examines his personal and work roles and their associated responsibilities.

Marco is surprised by the number of roles that he fills, including husband and church leader. In his work life, he identifies the roles of soldier, noncommissioned officer, and law enforcement officer. Marco picks four of the roles that he thinks are most important and identifies the main responsibilities of each:

Roles and Responsibilities	
Roles	**Responsibilities**
Church Leader	Help plan and execute the church's food pantry and shut-in assistance programs; Act as church's representative to the Area Interfaith Network
Soldier	Be as proficient as possible in my soldier tasks; serve the United States to the best of my ability
NCO	Lead and set the example for my soldiers; Train and develop my soldiers and myself
Law Enforcement	Respond to and resolve law violations; Be expert in the law and its application

Marco then examines his roles and responsibilities and identifies two topics that he would like to study and learn more about.

I would like to become more expert in tactical field skills and find a way to use my interests in foreign languages and culture in my work.

Needs of the Army

Another way to identify a satisfying direction for your self-development efforts is to match your interests to Army needs. You may find it rewarding to develop your interests and at the same time benefit the Army and your career.

Soldiers and Army units must be ready to deploy to any part of the world and perform diverse missions. Some requirements may be unforeseen and untrained, requiring Soldiers to use their knowledge, skills,

and creativity to accomplish the mission. As more members of a unit develop expertise in a variety of areas, the unit and the Army as a whole become stronger. The range and depth of expertise gives the unit resiliency and an increased ability to adapt to unique challenges.

There are many things that the Army must be able to do, including:

• Operate in other countries and work with other cultures.

• Train, lead, and care for Soldiers.

• Exercise sound judgment and critical thinking to help accomplish missions.

• Develop effective plans.

• Manage and maintain equipment and other resources.

You can learn more about Army needs and range of missions by asking more senior leaders who may have a broader perspective; consulting FM 3-0, *Operations*; and by reading documents like the *Army Posture Statement*, *Army Campaign Plan*, and *Army Vision*, which can be found on the Army website. Army Leadership doctrine provides a model of requirements that applies to both uniformed and civilian Army leaders. FM 6-22, Appendix A, provides a consolidated list of leader attributes and competencies that can help you identify developmental goals.

Exercise: Consider the Needs of the Army

Compare your interests to Army needs and list any matches that you identify below.

Needs of the Army	
Army Need	**Interests**

Now think about the interests and needs you have listed and identify knowledge, skills, or attitudes that you would like to learn or strengthen so that you can help meet the Army's needs. List the things you would like to learn below:

Marco's Story

Comparing Army needs to his interests, Marco realizes that his interests in wilderness backpacking, languages, and foreign cultures align well with the Army's need for leaders who can adapt and operate effectively in rugged conditions and who can understand, communicate, and work successfully with people of different countries and cultures. Marco's creativity, problem solving ability, and love of challenge also fit the responsibilities of a noncommissioned officer and a variety of Army missions such as special operations and counterinsurgency operations.

Needs of the Army	
Army Need	**Interests**
Flexible, adaptive leaders	Special operations
Special operations	Foreign languages & cultures
Physically resilient soldiers	Wilderness backpacking

Marco then thinks about the interests and needs he has listed and identifies several things he would like to learn more about.

Learn more about the needs and opportunities in Army special operations, especially the role and use of language skills, cultural knowledge, and other regional expertise.

Set Your Self-Development Direction

The exercises you completed in the last chapter and this one helped you think about self-development opportunities related to your strengths and weaknesses, roles and responsibilities, and the needs of the Army. Use this information to help set your direction for self-development.

Your self-development activities can be aimed at learning new knowledge, gaining or enhancing skills, changing your attitudes or values, or a combination of these.

Keep in mind that it is often easier to improve upon your strengths than your weaknesses, as you will generally learn more quickly and effectively when concentrating on your strengths. If there is a particular weakness that is holding you back, however, you may want to concentrate on improving it.

There is no formula for choosing a direction for your development. The exercises you have completed suggest areas in which you may want to develop yourself. Key considerations in setting your self-development direction include:

- Personal strengths

- Personal weaknesses

- Current or future roles

- Army needs

- Your interests

> "High expectations are the key to everything."
> – Sam Walton,
>   Founder of Wal-Mart

Your self-development direction is a personal choice and should be made based on the experiences and goals you would like to achieve in your military career, as well as your interests, needs, and resources. Ideally, your self-development direction will give you a long-term professional aim that you will work toward by doing a variety of activities that may be big or small. When you have weighed your options and selected a self-development direction, complete the sentence below.

My self-development direction is to _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Marco's Story

Considering his strengths and weaknesses, roles and responsibilities, and the needs of the Army, Marco decides that he wants to reclassify his military occupational specialty (MOS) from Military Police (31B) to Psychological Operations (37F). This change in MOS will allow him to perform work that better fits his interests and abilities. As a PSYOPS NCO, many of his pastimes and personal interests will become important parts of his job. He will have to become proficient in a foreign language and expert in the culture, geography, economy, and other aspects of a region of the world. PSYOPS, especially tactical level PSYOPS in support of Special Forces and Ranger operations, also fits his love of physical and mental challenges. From Marco's perspective, switching to 37F is ideal because it will put his career and life-long personal interests in other countries and cultures on the same track. As a result of his two-year tour in South Korea, he is especially interested in mastering the Korean language and learning all he can about North and South Korea and other countries in the region.

My self-development direction is _to prepare to meet the requirements for reclassification to PSYOPS and become an expert in the region of the Korean Peninsula_

Plan Milestones to Keep You on Track

Once you've set your self-development direction, you can create one or more milestones to get you started in the right direction and help you gauge your progress. Each time you reach one of the milestones, make another one that will stretch you even more. Your milestones can be short term or long term—whatever works for you and keeps you on track.

The milestones don't have to be complicated, but they should:

- **Be specific and measurable:** They need to say what you will accomplish so you can tell if you've met the milestone or not.

> "Luck tends to come to people that are well prepared."
> – GEN Colin Powell

- **Be meaningful:** They should help you achieve your self-development aims.

- **Provide a challenge:** Milestones should stretch your abilities and be challenging to accomplish. Challenging milestones increase motivation. Milestones that are too easy or hard hurt motivation.

- **Have a time limit:** Time limits will help motivate you and will help you gauge success.

- **Be flexible:** Build in some flexibility so that obstacles can more easily be overcome or milestones can be revised if your situation changes.

- **Be realistic:** Make sure that you're able to reach the milestone with the resources you have. For example, if you know that you will be deployed for the next 12 months, don't set a milestone that would require you to attend college during that time. Keep in mind that you'll likely be faced with obstacles along the way.

- **Be cost effective:** The benefits that you are likely to gain must be worth the effort, resources, risk, and other costs of reaching the milestone.

Every milestone requires at least a minimal amount of planning. Once you set your first milestone, create a plan to achieve it. A plan can increase your chances of success by:

- Making sure that you have identified all of the actions you must take

- Identifying the resources you will need to meet the milestone

- Establishing time estimates and deadlines that help you track your progress

- Keeping you from being overwhelmed by dividing large tasks into bite-sized pieces

- Identifying obstacles that you may encounter and the actions and resources that you will need to overcome them

- Helping you make the best use of your time and other resources

> "He who fails to plan, plans to fail."
> – Unknown Author

Complete the exercise below to create a plan for achieving your first milestone. After you've reached it, use this method to plan future milestones.

Exercise: Plan to Meet Your Milestone

List your first milestone below and identify the main steps you will need to take to reach it. Be sure to consider all of the developmental resources the Army has to offer, such as the Army Correspondence Course Program, Army eLearning courses, Army University Access Online (eArmyU), and Reimer Digital Library (RDL), as well as others from civilian sources. Identify potential enablers and obstacles before you begin, to better prepare yourself for difficulties along the way. Collaborating through Army Knowledge Online (AKO) forums and interest groups with others in the Army who share your interests may help your development and encourage you to stick with your plan.

Milestone Plan

Milestone:

Timeline for Meeting Milestone:

Steps to Reach Milestone:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Resources Required:

Potential Enablers (people, resources, and attitudes that can help me reach the milestone):

Potential Obstacles (Obstacles can be resistance from others, missing resources, shortage of time, other obligations, personal characteristics, and other things. See pages 40-42 for more information on obstacles or roadblocks.):

Plan to Overcome Obstacles:

Marco's Story

Marco decides that his initial milestones will focus on improving his chances of getting his reclassification request approved. Because language ability and regional expertise are vital to PSYOPS, Marco decides to work on improving his knowledge in these two areas. During the two years he spent in South Korea, Marco learned to speak enough Korean to hold simple conversations in the language. He also learned Hangul, the Korean alphabet, well enough to sound-out written words. Marco realizes that although this is a start, he will eventually need to become fluent in both spoken and written Korean if he is to focus on the Korean Peninsula as a PSYOPS NCO. Even though his DLAB score is probably high enough to support his reclassification request, Marco figures that enhancing his Korean language skills can only improve his chances for reclassification. As he works on his language skills, Marco also will study the culture, history, geography, economy, politics, and other aspects of North and South Korea.

Marco wants to improve his language skills quickly so that he doesn't have to delay his reclassification request too long. He plans to immerse himself in the Korean language as much as he can by combining computer language lessons with individual tutoring. He has some Korean-American friends who can help—SSG Kim, a squad leader in B Company, and Reverend Yi, the minister of a nearby Korean church, who Marco met through his work with the Area Interfaith Network. Both have invited Marco to attend local Korean gatherings where Marco can hear Korean being spoken, practice his own speaking, and learn more about Korean culture. He can sign up for online Rosetta Stone language training through the Army Knowledge Online (AKO) website, and the Post learning center also has Korean language CDs and textbooks that Marco can borrow.

Milestone Plan

Milestone:

Improve Korean language skills to earn elementary proficiency rating in speaking, listening, and reading

Timeline for Meeting Milestone:

Six months from today

Steps to Reach Milestone:

1. Find local resources for learning Korean (e.g., tutor, computer-based lessons, Korean organizations, practice partner, books)

2 Design learning plan with help of tutor or Korean expert

3 Execute learning plan

4 Take language proficiency test to measure progress every two months

Resources Required:

Korean language expert, training materials (books, computer programs), language proficiency test, study time

Potential Enablers (people, resources, and attitudes that can help me reach the milestone):

First Sergeant, language lessons through Army website, post education center, SSG Kim in B Co. and Rev. Yi at the Korean Church as experts/native Korean speakers, PSYOP forums on AKO

Potential Obstacles (Obstacles can be resistance from others, missing resources, shortage of time, other obligations, personal characteristics, and other things. See pages 40-42 for more information on obstacles or roadblocks.):

Limited time, difficulty of Korean language

Plan to Overcome Obstacles:

Follow a work plan and track success, take advantage of down-time during duty shifts to study and practice with language recordings, get help from SSG Kim and Rev. Yi

Now that you have set your self-development direction and created a plan for reaching your first milestone, it's time to take action. Most of your self-development actions will focus on learning new knowledge, skills, or attitudes. To help you make the most of your self-development efforts, practical tips and methods for improving your ability to learn are provided in the next chapter, *How Do I Learn?*

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3. How Do I Learn?

Self-development requires learning. Knowing how to learn is the most important competency required for self-development. Because learning is so crucial, this chapter is devoted to helping you learn how you can learn better. Understanding yourself, setting your self-development direction, and planning your milestones (discussed in previous chapters) all influence your ability to learn. Beyond that, effective learning requires that you:

- Be motivated and persistent.

- Make the most of all learning opportunities.

- Use effective learning methods.

- Practice deep processing.

- Learn effectively from books.

> "The illiterate of the future will not be the person who cannot read. It will be the person who does not know how to learn."
>
> — Alvin Toffler

This chapter will help you "learn to learn" so that you can make the most of learning opportunities and recall your new knowledge or skills at will.

Be Motivated and Persistent

Self-development may require hard work over a long period of time, especially if you hope to become an expert in an area or undergo significant personal growth. It will take more than just good intentions to keep your self-development effort alive—it will take motivation and effort. Genuine motivation provides lasting energy because it is the internalization of your goals and your desire to achieve them. Use the tips below to stay motivated and to persist in the effort required to make significant changes:

- Recognize the benefits of your self-development efforts. Think about:

  - Why the results of your efforts are important to you.

  - How you will feel when you have reached your self-development milestones.

  - The positive impact your efforts will have on others.

- Plan learning activities so that they:

  - Are connected to the real world.

  - Teach you knowledge, skills, or attitudes that will help you understand and function better.

  - Satisfy your curiosity.

- Set specific and difficult milestones to help move you along your developmental path.

Milestones should:

- "Stretch" you enough to provide a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when you have achieved them.

- Not be so difficult that you stand a high chance of failing (know your limits).

• Reward yourself for accomplishing your learning tasks and milestones.

- Decide on the reward before you begin learning.

- Keep the size of your rewards appropriate for the size of the task.

- Don't give yourself the reward if you don't accomplish what you planned.

• Treat working on your self-development like it is your job.

- Pick specific times during the day to work on self-development tasks. Make it part of your routine.

• Keep up your momentum.

- Don't start a learning task then put it down for too long.

- Work on the task a little every day until you have accomplished it.

- Break a big task into smaller ones that you can accomplish in a reasonable amount of time.

• Get support from others.

- Find other people (family members, friends, supervisor, etc.) to encourage you, recognize your accomplishments, and act as sounding boards.

- Observe people who have successfully achieved their goals. Learn and model what they do.

• Review what you have learned so far.

- Think about the progress you've made, how you've grown, and the challenges you've overcome.

- Learn from your mistakes and don't repeat them.

Marco's Story

Marco knows that keeping his motivation high and making a steady effort are essential to accomplishing his developmental goals. Marco is enthused about the milestone that he has set for himself. He wants to reach elementary proficiency in speaking, listening, and reading the Korean language within six months. This is a "stretch" milestone for Marco. It is ambitious enough to be a challenge, but within his ability to accomplish if he gives it a solid effort.

By improving his Korean language skills, Marco hopes to increase his chances of getting reclassified to the PSYOPS career field. He keeps his motivation high by reminding himself of the benefits he will gain if he is able to transfer to PSYOPS. He'll have a fascinating career path that will allow him to travel to different parts of the world and work with people from many countries. He'll also have the opportunity to become a recognized expert in the Korean region of the world and make important contributions to the Army. Marco imagines the physical and mental demands he will face in a PSYOPS career and is excited by the prospect of testing himself against these challenges.

Whenever possible, his weekend activities will include involvement in Korean cultural events and exposure to native Korean speakers through the local Korean church and Korean-American Club. This direct involvement with native Koreans will help personalize his learning. To connect his studies to the real world, help improve his interpretation skills, and expand his cultural knowledge, Marco also will watch the daily news and selected programs on the Korean language cable TV channel.

Make the Most of Learning Opportunities

You can learn from deliberate planned activities, or from the unplanned experiences of daily life. Whether planned or not, you should make the most of each learning opportunity as it presents itself.

Planned learning can be imbedded into your job or routine by using normal events as learning opportunities, or it can be a completely separate, scheduled activity designed to accomplish something specific. Prepare for the unexpected times for study by having appropriate learning materials with you. It is a good idea to take advantage of time as it opens up such as from transportation delays, waiting for appointments, or cancelled events.

Unplanned learning happens when something unexpectedly captures your attention during the course of your day. Your interest in the topic causes you to stop, pay attention, and learn. You can actually prepare your unconscious to draw your attention to information related to your self-development aims. Do this by thinking about your developmental aims in detail—what you are trying to accomplish and why you want to accomplish these things. Review what you know and what you need to learn. Remind yourself of key terms and ideas related to your subject as well as who the experts in the field are.

Use Effective Learning Methods

The purpose of each of your learning activities will help determine the learning principles you should use to make the most of your learning. Your purpose may be to learn new knowledge, a new skill, or a new attitude about something. No matter what your purpose, there are general principles of learning that apply.

General Learning Principles

- Use as many of your senses as you can. Your memory stores information according to your senses (how it looks, sounds, feels, etc.). The more senses you use while you are learning, the better you will remember the information and be able to recall it later. Involve several of your senses by writing, highlighting, reciting information aloud, observing, etc.

- Space out your learning sessions. Don't try to learn a large amount of information or a complex skill in one long session; try to study material a little at a time.

- Study the information or practice the skill on multiple occasions.

- Know the time of the day when you learn best and study your most difficult material during that time.

- Design your learning activities so that they mimic real life as much as possible. If you can't duplicate the conditions in which you expect to use the information, try to imagine the conditions as vividly as possible.

- Review information soon after you learn it, such as right after class is over. Using the information is a good way to review and test your memory.

- When learning an entirely new field, go slow at first to make sure you thoroughly understand the basics—it's important to have a solid foundation to build on.

- Learn in layers. Start with what you know and then determine what the first level of understanding, information, or skill is that you need to learn. Learn that level and then determine what the information you just learned suggests that you need to learn next. Each level builds on the previous and usually becomes more detailed and connected.

- Learn like a scientist. Scientists adopt the attitude that all knowledge is tentative and that new discoveries may prove old beliefs or assumptions wrong. Start your inquiry with a problem or question. Find evidence that answers the question and test possible explanations to gather evidence. Analyze the evidence and develop your explanation.

Marco's Story

Marco uses spaced and repeated practice as his basic approach to learning the Korean language. Marco realizes that learning a language takes time and requires a lot of practice. He makes his language studies part of his daily routine. He knows that his mind is clearest and he does his best thinking in the morning, so he plans to spend a half hour each morning before work completing the Rosetta Stone language lessons available through AKO. He also will load speaking drills into his MP3 player so that he can use them to build his vocabulary and practice

listening and speaking whenever time permits. He can even connect his MP3 player to his car radio so he can practice while he drives to and from work. Marco also plans to spend two hours studying Korean language, culture, and related information on the weekends. His weekend work will include interaction with local Korean-Americans to add realism to his studies and help involve multiple senses as he learns.

Principles for Specific Types of Learning

While the general learning principles described above apply to all types of learning, there are also learning principles that apply based on whether your learning activity focuses on learning new knowledge, a new skill, or a new attitude.

- Learning new *knowledge* requires that you link the new information to information that you already know. You do this by deeply processing the information that you want to learn. Deep processing and the related mental skills of critical and reflective thinking are described in greater detail below.

- Learning or improving a *skill* requires repeated, deliberate practice. Deliberate practice is not just repetition of a skill. Deliberate practice involves:

  - Making your best attempt at performing the skill,

  - Analyzing the results of your attempt (sometimes with the help of a coach or teacher) to identify ways of improving your performance, and

  - Attempting the skill again using the improvements you identified.

- Learning a new *attitude* about something requires repeated exposure to and testing of the attitude. Taking on a new attitude might involve realizing that a viewpoint that you had is counterproductive to your goals. Changing your attitude can be done in two ways:

  - You can behave as if you have already adopted the new attitude. If you do this often with positive results, it is likely that you will actually adopt the attitude.

  - You can observe another person behaving in a way that reflects the attitude. If you respect this person as a role model and you see the person gaining some benefit from the behavior, you may eventually come to accept and adopt the attitude for yourself.

Practice Deep Processing

Your ability to learn and recall information depends upon what you do with the information when you are trying to learn it. The difficulty or effort of your thinking is not as important as the kind of thinking you use. Deep processing requires that you analyze the new information, pick it apart, use it, and connect it to information you already know. There are many ways you can think deeply about the information you want to learn:

- Relate the new information to things you already know. ***This is the most important factor in learning***. The more connections you can make, the more ways you will have to recall the new information.

- Think about conflicts between the new information you are learning and your previous understanding of the topic. Resolve the conflict in your own mind and be sure you can explain your final conclusion and how you reached it.

- Summarize the material you are learning in your own words.

- Study the structure of your subject—the way that facts, ideas, and principles are related to each other. Draw pictures or diagrams that show the connections between components. Diagrams can also be useful for learning the steps in a process.

- Organize new information into categories. For example, group illnesses by their symptoms, exercises by their physical benefits, or aircraft by their purpose.

- Ask and answer questions that will make new facts, ideas, and principles useful and important to you. For example:

  - "How does this relate to what I already knew?"

  - "What does this imply?"

  - "What other examples of this can I remember?"

  - "Why is this important to me (or others)?"

  - "Where else could this apply?"

  - "Where or how could I use this?"

- Think of what the new information you are learning reminds you of. Develop metaphors and comparisons for the information you are learning.

- Explain or teach the material to another. Did you get it right? Did you cover it all? Does your explanation demonstrate that you understand it? Using the new information with others will test your mastery of it, and their reaction may help you understand more.

- Argue one or both sides of an issue. You can do this with yourself to help you think about the truthfulness of a position. Get your ego involved by pretending that you are in a hotly contested debate or trial.

- Personalize the information you are learning by relating it to experiences you have had or expect to have in the future.

Marco's Story

As Marco studies the Korean language and culture, he applies the principles of deep processing in a number of ways. Drawing on the experiences of his two years in Korea, he recalls events in which he could have used the phrases and vocabulary he is learning. He visualizes himself having conversations in these events using the new words and phrases he is learning. As he reads and watches TV shows about South Korea, he is especially alert to depictions of culture, conditions, lifestyle, and so on that differ from his own observations. He considers why his personal perceptions might be different from his study sources and discusses the differences with his Korean friends to resolve the discrepancies. He compares written descriptions of North Korea with descriptions and personal observations of South Korea to identify both differences and similarities. He is also alert to differences and similarities between Korean and American culture and society so that he can better see the world from a Korean perspective. He tries to see how the elements of the Korean culture fit together to make a social system that works.

Realizing that countries and their cultures evolve and change over time, Marco tries to understand the historical influences that helped shape the two Koreas to their present forms. To help him visualize and understand these influences, Marco draws a timeline of the major events of recorded Korean history and how they affected North and South Korea.

As he studies Korean language and culture, Marco notices and thinks about how the culture is reflected in the language. For example, he sees that the Korean language contains a number of words that show respect for others who are older than the speaker and concludes that this might show the influence of Confucian values, especially esteem for the elderly.

Using critical and reflective thinking skills is essential to being an effective learner and gaining expertise in any subject. Critical and reflective thinking are important ways of deeply processing information that you wish to learn.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking involves questioning what you see, hear, read, or experience. Critical thinking requires you to analyze, compare, contrast, make inferences and predictions, evaluate the strength of evidence, and draw conclusions. Critical thinking also requires the self-discipline to use reason and avoid impulsive conclusions. Here are examples of questions that you can use to guide your critical thinking:

• What is the evidence for and against this conclusion?

• What are the alternative or competing theories, explanations, or perspectives?

• Why is this important?

• What are the implications of this?

• Is the logic of the argument or reasoning sound?

• Do the numbers, quantities, and calculations make sense?

• Do the supporting facts agree with other sources?

• Why or how does this work?

• How likely is this?

Most times critical thinking comes down to applying an attitude of high quality in your thinking. Quality translates to intellectual standards that have been suggested by Doctors Richard Paul and Linda Elder from the Foundation for Critical Thinking:

• *Clarity* – What is really meant, what is the problem?

• *Accuracy* – Is the point true, is it possible?

• *Precision* – What are the specifics related to an assertion or proposed solution?

• *Relevance* – Does it matter, is there a good connection to the larger issue?

• *Depth* – What factors make this difficult, what are the most important complexities?

• *Breadth* – Is there another perspective that is helpful?

• *Logic* – Does a conclusion follow from the evidence, does everything fit together?

• *Significance* – What is the central issue or idea, what is most important to consider?

• *Fairness* – Would any reasonable, unbiased person view this as fair; have opposing, multiple viewpoints been treated fairly?

Learning and applying these thinking standards is what makes critical thinking most effective.

Reflective Thinking

Reflective thinking is closely related to critical thinking, but it seeks to build understanding, interpret experiences, and resolve questions. Reflective thinking requires that you think through the information you have gathered in detail to organize it, apply principles, make connections, and form conclusions.

• What does this information mean?

• What conclusions can I draw from this?

• How can I use this information?

• How does this fit with my existing knowledge and past experiences?

• What are the implications of this for me or others?

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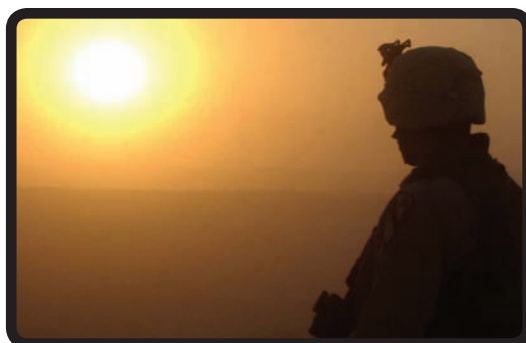
- What is the big picture and how does this fit into it?

- What is the best way to learn about this subject?

- Where should this take me in my studies and self-development?

Critical thinking and reflective thinking do not apply solely to learning but are good and essential practices for duties across the full spectrum of Army operations.

Marco's Story

Marco considers the implications of what he is learning for the work of a PSYOPS NCO. For example, he builds a list of specialized vocabulary words and phrases to learn that he believes will be useful for PSYOPS work. He also thinks about how knowledge of Korean culture might affect the way a persuasive PSYOPS message is crafted. He looks for general principles or guidelines for considering culture when writing a persuasive message. He relates the cultural knowledge he is gaining to his own experiences in Korea and begins to see some of his experiences from a different perspective. Marco also frequently takes stock of his learning to determine what he has accomplished and what he should focus on next.

Learn Effectively From Written Materials

Books and other written materials are likely to be key learning resources for your self-development. To maximize your learning, you must approach reading for learning differently than you do casual reading. Deep processing of written materials is essential to your ability to understand, recall, and use the information contained in the books and other documents you read. Even though books may present information in a logical way, you must take an active role in teaching the information to yourself.

The SQ3R reading method makes extensive use of deep processing principles. Developed more than 60 years ago, the five activities of the SQ3R method comprise one of the most widely recommended and effective ways of learning from written materials.

1. *Survey:* Before you begin to read, look over the chapter, article, or other material you are about to read to build a mental framework or outline of the material and establish a purpose for reading it. This mental framework will help you understand the purpose of the material, set your expectations so that your attention will be drawn to important information, activate your memory of what you already know, and give you a skeleton of understanding that you can add to as you read. Survey the material by leafing through it and doing the following:

- Make predictions about what you think the sections of the document will discuss. It doesn't matter whether you are 100% accurate, but it helps you be more active in understanding the material.

- Note the title, headings, and subheadings so that you can see the sequence of topics and how they relate to each other.

- Look at graphs, charts, diagrams, and pictures, and read their captions.

- Read quotations, vignettes, and other short statements that are set off from the main text.

- Scan footnotes to get a sense of where ideas come from or what they mean.

- Note words and phrases that are highlighted (e.g., bold, italic, underlined, colored text).

- Read the introduction, abstract, and summary if there is one; if not, read the first and last paragraphs.

- Read the first and last sentences of each paragraph.

- Review other learning aids that the material may have, such as study guides, advance organizers, chapter outlines, learning objectives, or review questions.

- Decide what you want to learn from the material.

2. *Question:* As you survey the material, write down questions that you want to have answered as you read the material. Developing questions to guide your study increases your interest in the material, makes you more alert to important information, helps you stay involved with the material, and relates the new knowledge to what you already know. To develop questions:

- Turn the title, headings, and subheadings into questions. For example, if a subheading says "The Four-Step Calibration Process," your question might be, "What are the four steps of the calibration process?"

- Ask questions about graphs, charts, diagrams, and pictures. For example, a graph showing an increasing rate of traffic fatalities in the United States could lead to the question, "Why have traffic fatalities increased in the United States?"

- Consider questions that the author includes in the document, such as in call-out boxes or review questions at the end of a chapter. It can help to rephrase these questions in your own words so that they are more meaningful to you and easier to remember.

3. *Read:* Read the material one section at a time. Use multiple senses by reading, writing, highlighting, and maybe even reading aloud. This will help you understand, remain interested, and retain the information.

- Look for the answers to your questions and write your answers in your own words.

- Look for more questions that you need to answer and important information that you had not anticipated.

- Use deep processing to relate the new information to things you already know.

- Highlight important information, especially information that answers the questions you wrote.

- Write notes in the margins of the document or on separate paper. These can be key words or phrases, definitions, reminders to guide your studying, and other useful points to remember.

- Make diagrams that show how a process works, timeline, sequence of events, or the relationships that exist between different components.

- Respond to points made in the document by writing your ideas about them in the margins. This will help you personalize the information and relate it to information you already know. For example, you might write a note about why you disagree with a point, how a stated idea relates to another idea you learned elsewhere, gaps or questions that remain in the information, or implications of the information.

- Look for connections, discrepancies, comparisons, and relationships between information presented within the document and other readings, lectures, personal experience, etc.

4. **_Recite:_** Reciting tests your knowledge and understanding of the information you read. Testing yourself is a method of deep processing that can enhance your memory. Reciting as you learn also helps ensure that you don't leave gaps in your knowledge.

- Stop reading at the end of each section and summarize the material in the section from memory.

- Ask yourself the questions you previously wrote for that section.

- Explain charts, graphs, diagrams, etc. without referring to the text or your notes.

- If you have problems, go back and review the section until you can recite its important information and concepts from memory.

5. **_Review:_** Reviewing helps refresh and strengthen your memory of the material you read.

- Review immediately after you have read the entire article or chapter. Review the document again within 24 hours and again several days later.

- After you have read the entire article or chapter, flip back through it, looking at headings, subheadings, graphs, charts, diagrams, and so on. See if you can recall the important information for each item. Study the material to fill in any gaps.

- Go back through all of the questions you wrote and see if you can answer them from memory. Study the material to answer any questions you missed.

- Explain how all of the sections or chapters of the document fit together. What are the overarching points and principles?

- Explain how the information in this document relates to your self-development goals.

- You may find it useful to review with a friend who has studied the same document. The interaction can help keep you alert and focused, provide you with different perspectives on the material, and clarify difficult or misunderstood points.

Expanding Your Reading

Documents often suggest related documents that you may want to read to expand you knowledge of the subject. Related documents may be listed at the end of a chapter, or you may want to take a look at the bibliography, footnotes, or end of the book to identify information sources that the author used in preparing to write the document. To help narrow your search, make notes as you read the document of any reference that sounds interesting and relevant to your self-development focus.

Journal Your Learning

Many people find it useful to keep track of their chosen direction for development, their milestones, and interesting points they encounter during learning. Journals also are useful to record observations about the most effective ways to learn, new interests, future milestones, and any other notes that apply to planning, conducting, or tracking your self-development. The exercises and worksheets in this handbook should be essential entries in your learning journal.

The methods and principles of learning in this chapter will help you become a more efficient and effective learner. Use these tips to make the most of your self-development efforts. Putting your plan into action and persisting until you have achieved your self-development outcomes is the topic of the next chapter, *How Do I Move Forward?*

Notes

4. How Do I Move Forward?

Now that you have set your self-development direction and discovered new approaches to improve the way you learn, it's time to get started to achieve your first self-development milestone.

Your self-development efforts will take time and effort. To stay on track:

• Let your milestones guide you.

• Overcome self-development roadblocks.

• Work efficiently.

• Maintain forward momentum.

• Assess your progress.

• Make course corrections.

• Set your next milestone.

> "There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure."
> — GEN Colin Powell

This chapter will help you achieve your first milestones and keep moving forward.

Let Your Milestones Guide You

In Chapter 2, you set your self-development direction, created one or more milestones, and developed a plan to reach those milestones. Use your first milestones as your guide to get started, as they will help you:

• Avoid impulsive actions that may be ineffective and leave you discouraged.

• Keep the big picture in mind.

• Work effectively toward your self-development direction.

• Take advantage of resources and overcome roadblocks.

• Measure your success.

Adjust your plan to reach your milestones as needed. You should be willing to update your plan to improve it, change its direction, deal with roadblocks, take advantage of resources, and reflect accomplishments.

Overcome Self-Development Roadblocks

In making your milestone plan, you identified obstacles to reaching your first milestone. No matter how prepared you are, there is always the possibility of running into roadblocks along the way. Below are possible internal and external roadblocks you may encounter as you work to develop yourself.

Internal Roadblocks

Procrastination is a major obstacle to self-development. People procrastinate for a lot of reasons. Some come to realize that their milestones are too ambitious, complex, unclear, or difficult. Others are hesitant because of the effort and discomfort that the work requires. Still others lack the motivation to get started. If you find yourself procrastinating, here are techniques to help you get back on track.

- Write it down:
  - Write down your direction and milestones and post them where you will see them frequently.
  - List the benefits of doing the work.
  - Write down your next planned action and your deadline for doing it.
- Involve others:
  - Tell others what you intend to do and your deadline for doing it.
  - Talk through the task with someone else.
  - Schedule time with someone else to study or work together.
- Break it down:
  - Break big jobs into smaller tasks so you can, "eat the elephant one bite at a time."
  - Make a list of the small steps required to accomplish each milestone.
  - Start with easy steps then gradually build to more difficult steps.
  - Mentally rehearse a difficult task or talk through the task with someone else.
- Make a routine:
  - Pick a routine time to work on your self-development activities.
  - Use good time management skills and make a schedule.
  - Plunge into the task immediately to gain momentum, then keep it going.
- Know yourself:
  - Know your habits. Recognize what you do to avoid things you don't want to do. Confront yourself when you see yourself doing these things.
  - Identify self-defeating attitudes and replace them with positive ones.
  - If you repeatedly put off a task, decide if you really intend to do it. If not, remove it from your plan.
  - Be open to deviations in your plans and milestones. If you find an area that is not at all interesting or overly complex, then consider an adjustment for a higher potential path.

- Get motivated. Review the tips for staying motivated and persistent in your learning described in Chapter 3, *How Do I Learn*?

A poor attitude also can interfere with your learning and make it hard for you to understand and remember information. For example, thinking that math is hard or that you do not like history can interfere with your ability to learn anything related to math or history. Other attitudes, such as closed mindedness, inflexibility, or rigid adherence to beliefs and assumptions, also can interfere with your learning.

To combat poor attitudes, you'll need to notice when you're working with a poor attitude and identify a more productive replacement. Practice thinking and behaving with the more positive attitude until it feels natural and becomes a habit.

External Roadblocks

External factors like your workload or other personal or professional obligations may hinder your self-development efforts. You also may encounter resistance from other people, such as from your spouse who may resent time away from the family or friends who may pressure you to spend time with them.

A lack of resources is another common roadblock. Resources include anything you might need for self-development including people (teachers, coaches, mentors), facilities (schools, libraries, museums), and things (training programs, books, equipment). External roadblocks are best handled by careful planning and creativity.

Marco's Story

Marco plunged into his self-development program with great enthusiasm. He enrolled in the Korean language course offered through AKO, borrowed Korean language CDs from the Education Center, downloaded phrase guides from the Internet, purchased a Korean language textbook, and checked out library books on Korean history, culture, economy, and geography. He immersed himself in his studies, exceeding his plan from the very start by getting up early enough to spend an hour or more on language lessons before going to work, reading late into the evening, and spending most of the first weekend reading and studying.

By Tuesday of the second week, Marco began having a hard time completing the work he had laid out for himself. It seemed like there was always something that interfered with his studies. As the days passed, it became increasingly difficult to get out of bed early enough to work on his language studies. In the evening, he found himself watching more and more TV. He would promise himself that he would watch just one TV show and then get back to work, but one show would lead to another and soon the evening was gone. He also lost one entire evening by going to the gym with a couple of friends. Each night, when he prepared for bed, he felt guilty about the time he had lost that day. He told himself that he would work extra hard the next day

to catch up, but when the next day came, he found himself procrastinating again and falling even further behind. By Friday of the second week, he was discouraged by how little he had accomplished and his initial enthusiasm had diminished noticeably.

He thought about the difficulties he was experiencing and realized that he was procrastinating to avoid the discomfort and isolation of long hours of study and loss of his favorite pastimes. He still believed that his milestone for improving his Korean language skills and regional knowledge was worthwhile, but he knew that he wouldn't succeed if he continued to procrastinate. Recognizing and confronting his self-defeating behavior was a useful first step in overcoming the problem, but knew he needed to do more.

Marco realized that he had jumped into his studies so completely that he had quickly burned himself out. He decided to address "burn-out" and make adjustments to feel better about learning. He decided to reduce his morning study time to the half hour that he had originally planned, and he established firm limits on the amount of time he would spend studying in the evenings and on the weekends. He also broke down his milestone into a series of smaller objectives that could each be accomplished in about a day. He wrote the objectives on his calendar to set deadlines for their completion. He also planned small rewards that he would give himself for completing each objective. To help gain the support of his friends, Marco told them about his self-development milestone and discussed the work he would have to do to achieve it. Finally, to avoid isolating himself from his friends, he set aside times during the week that he would spend with them.

Work Efficiently

Most people have busy lives before adding self-development to the mix. By efficiently managing your workload and personal life, you can increase the amount of time you have to spend on self-development. Here are some tips to help you be more efficient.

- Take care of yourself. You need food, exercise, and rest to function at your best.

- Keep a running "to do" list. Prioritize each task according to its importance, the amount of work required, and how soon you must complete it. Remove low-priority tasks from your list.

- Look for ways to accomplish daily activities and routines in less time. For example, combine several errands in a single trip instead of making individual trips.

- Learn to quickly locate and obtain the information you need for your self-development and other requirements of your daily life.

- Organize your work and living areas so that the information, tools, and workspace you need are readily available.

Maintain Forward Momentum

It is important to keep your developmental momentum moving forward. You may have a tendency to slow down after completing an important self-development step or to become discouraged by setbacks. Taking a rest after a strong effort is natural, but too much rest may make it hard for you to get started again. Maintain your momentum by:

- *Keeping a Positive Attitude:* Let go of setbacks and start each day with renewed enthusiasm. Each morning offers an opportunity for a fresh start.

- *Making Consistent Progress:* Try to accomplish something, however small, related to your self-development milestone each day.

- *Recognizing Benefits:* Look for the benefits of your efforts. Benefits can be tangible results like increased pay, awards, and abilities or intangible results like pride, a sense of accomplishment, and satisfaction. Remember that important benefits often require hard work, sometimes more effort than was anticipated.

Marco's Story

After revising his plan, Marco had successfully followed the new plan for five days. He decided to put his initial difficulty behind him and just focus on continuing to follow his study schedule and accomplish the daily work objectives he had set for himself. By setting reasonable objectives, rewarding himself for accomplishing his objectives, and setting aside time for his friends and family, he had achieved a better balance in his life and actually made his self-development efforts fun. Although the daily work objectives were still a challenge, he was not overwhelmed and knew that he was capable of achieving them one at a time. Marco could see how his daily objectives formed a clear path to his milestone and was excited by this promise of success.

Assess Your Progress

Assessing your progress can encourage you to keep going if things are going well or to guide changes if they aren't. You can assess your progress at any time—as you work toward a milestone or after you have completed one. Here are tips to help you assess your progress.

- Use objective and subjective measures.

  - *Objective measures* are things that you can see and that can be expressed in numbers, such as a score on a test, time required to perform a task, number of books read, or number of college credits earned.

- **Subjective measures** are things that can't be easily observed or expressed in numbers, including feelings of satisfaction, accomplishment, personal growth, difficulty, and so on. Subjective assessments of your progress can come from both your own judgment and from feedback from others who have observed you. Subjective indicators are sufficient for tracking most self-development activities.

- Compare your milestone plan (developed in Chapter 2) to what actually happened and adjust the remainder of this milestone plan or future milestones to account for any lessons learned.

  - **Timeline:** Did you meet your timeline? If you were well under or over your timeline, figure out why. Maybe the timeline wasn't reasonable, you worked more or less than you had anticipated, you received extra help, you encountered roadblocks, or the material was more involved than you initially thought.

  - **Action Steps:** How successful were you in accomplishing the steps you identified for reaching your milestone? What helped or hurt your success? Were the steps you identified the right ones?

  - **Resources:** Were you right about the types of resources you needed to achieve the milestone? Were there any that you had left out when you made your plan? Were you able to get the resources you needed, and what did you have to do to get them? Are there any other resources that might have worked better?

  - **Obstacles:** Did you encounter the obstacles that you identified in your plan, and was your plan for overcoming these obstacles successful? Did you encounter any unexpected obstacles?

- Decide if you are satisfied with your progress or if you need to make changes to your milestones or your general self-development direction. Indicators that you should consider in making a course correction include:

  - Unsatisfactory progress

  - Too much stress or effort required on your part to complete developmental activities

  - Loss of interest in achieving your self-development aims or change in the benefits you can expect from achieving your aims

  - Changes in your professional or personal situation that conflict with your self-development activities or direction

  - Being dissatisfied with your development

Marco's Story

After completing the first two months of his milestone plan, Marco assessed his progress. Throughout this time he had taken numerous quizzes and tests as part of his online Korean language lessons and had scored high on most. His greatest gains had been in speaking and listening. The list of Korean words that he could speak and understand had grown impressively long. He found that he could have more complex conversations in Korean and that he could understand more of the Korean TV shows that he watched. His written Korean skills also had progressed but not as rapidly. Because Hangul is a phonetic alphabet, he could sound out written Korean words, and he could write most Korean words, but his reading speed was slow and he had difficulty writing full sentences.

When he compared his milestone plan to what he had actually done during the two months, Marco was generally satisfied. Even though he had suffered a setback in his second week, he had made adjustments to overcome his initial procrastination, followed his plan, and made satisfactory progress afterward. The main obstacles that he had encountered were the huge study load he had initially tried to handle and his isolation from friends and favorite activities. The adjustments he had made to his milestone plan had been crucial to his success. By dividing his plan into small steps with clear objectives he was able to set a pace of work that he could handle and still make substantial progress.

Marco hadn't yet reached the language proficiency and regional expertise that he wanted, but his milestone plan had been effective, and he was sure that if he continued to follow his plan he would continue to progress. Although he had made good progress in his speaking and listening abilities, he was concerned by the slower progress he was making in his reading and writing skills.

Make Course Corrections

Self-development occurs over a long period of time and in a dynamic environment that includes your professional and personal responsibilities. It is likely that at some point you will encounter an obstacle or other challenge that will force you to change your plans.

If your progress assessment shows that you need a course correction, you will need to determine what type of correction is warranted.

- *Direction:* Your self-development direction or milestone may have turned out to be too difficult, too easy, or just not what you had hoped. If so, use the exercises in Chapter 2 to examine other possible self-development directions or milestones. Try to identify why you selected an unsatisfactory direction or milestone, and avoid repeating any missteps.

- *Action Steps:* If the action you took to achieve your milestone were not effective, figure out why they didn't work, and then develop more effective actions. To be effective, you must be capable and willing to perform the actions with available resources. If you are making a course correction because of roadblocks you encountered, then create new action steps that avoid or solve these roadblocks. Your action steps should form a logical path from where you currently are to achievement of the milestone.

- *Resources:* The resources you identified for your milestone may have turned out to be inappropriate, inadequate, or unavailable. If so, analyze your planned action steps to determine the resources (time, money, equipment, facilities, help, etc.) you will need to perform these steps. Determine if you can obtain the resources.

> "In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die, and the choices that we make are ultimately our responsibility."
>
> – Eleanor Roosevelt

Marco's Story

Marco decided to continue to follow his milestone plan, but he wanted to increase its emphasis on reading and writing skills. He spoke with his friends, SSG Kim and Reverend Yi, about ways to improve his reading and writing abilities. They gave Marco copies of newspapers and other documents written in Hangul and had Marco read portions of them. Sometimes Marco would immediately read and explain them aloud, and at other times Marco would read the articles at home and send them an email, written in Hangul, explaining the main ideas. Marco also would handwrite short translations of written and spoken English and show his translations to SSG Kim or Reverend Yi for feedback.

Set Your Next Milestone

With your first self-development milestone achieved, you have finished a full cycle of self-development. It's now time to continue your self-development journey by setting and pursuing your next milestone.

Exercise: Set Your Next Milestone

Select your next milestone by identifying the next logical step that you should take in your self-development direction. Of the objectives you might pursue, which one would make the greatest contribution to your overall self-development aims? Pick the milestone that will make the greatest contribution while still being within your capabilities and resources.

Milestone Plan

Milestone:

Timeline for Meeting Milestone:

Steps to Reach Milestone:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Resources Required:

Potential Enablers (people, resources, and attitudes that can help me reach the milestone):

Potential Obstacles (Obstacles can be resistance from others, missing resources, shortage of time, other obligations, personal characteristics, and other things. See pages 40-42 for more information on obstacles or roadblocks.):

Plan to Overcome Obstacles:

Marco's Story

After nearly six months of consistent effort, Marco reached his milestone. He scored at the elementary proficiency level in listening and reading on the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) for the Korean language. He also had submitted his request for reclassification to PSYOPS, and initial feedback on his application looked good. Even though Marco knows that as a PSYOPS NCO it will be important to continually improve his language skills and regional knowledge, he believes that he has advanced enough in these areas for the time being that he can begin to work toward another self-development milestone.

Marco's long-term developmental focus remains on PSYOPS. He believes that he should now begin to focus on the military aspects of psychological operations. He knows that when his reclassification is approved, the Army will train him in PSYOPS tactics, techniques, and procedures, so he thinks it would be useful to gain a broader background understanding of PSYOPS. He wants to learn how psychological operations have been used in the past, what the outcomes of those operations have been, and what factors have been important in making psychological operations successes or failures. He also wants to learn about current and likely future uses of PSYOPS.

Milestone Plan

Milestone:

Gain a strong understanding of the history and likely future of psychological operations, including how it has evolved, how different countries have used it, what has made it successful (or not), and the role it is likely to play in the future

Timeline for Meeting Milestone:

Four months from today

Steps to Reach Milestone:

1. Find books, articles, and other resources on PSYOPS history and future

2. Talk with the command historian about how to find information and approach study of PSYOPS

3. Design a learning plan

4. Execute the learning plan

Resources Required:

Books, journals, and other sources of information; study time

Potential Enablers (people, resources, and attitudes that can help me reach the milestone):
Command historian, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Special Warfare School
Potential Obstacles (Obstacles can be resistance from others, missing resources, shortage of time, other obligations, personal characteristics, and other things. See pages 40-42 for more information on obstacles or roadblocks.):
Insufficient information on PSYOPS history and future, insufficient time to study
Plan to Overcome Obstacles:
Use all resources to locate information, make detailed plan with weekly or daily study objectives

Self-Development Throughout Your Career

The gravity of the Army mission and the dynamic nature of the world make continuous learning and self-development crucial to our nation's security and your personal success.

Changes in technology, knowledge, and society happen so fast that lessons you've learned in Army and civilian schools are often incomplete or quickly outdated. Courses are often too general to meet individuals' specific needs. To thrive professionally and personally, you must engage in lifelong learning and self-development.

Professionals at all stages of their careers are challenged to find the proper balance between their professional work and personal life while also planning their career development. Most career planning models have the following common steps:

1. Conduct a self-assessment (abilities, characteristics, needs, responsibilities, objectives, etc.) to determine your strengths and weaknesses.

2. Weigh the possibilities to choose a direction and milestone objectives for your self-development effort.

3. Make a self-development plan that uses effective methods of learning.

4. Implement the plan, overcoming obstacles and measuring progress.

This handbook has sought to help you implement these steps while also allowing you the flexibility to use methods that have worked for you in the past or to customize the steps to your individual preferences. The chapters and tools contained within this handbook should assist you in planning and pursuing your lifelong path of self-development regardless of your career stage, developmental interests, or career goals.